

Black Americans have had higher levels of COVID-19-related unemployment.

Beyond the pandemic, other challenges remain. Systemic racism persists in our economy, in our schools, in our healthcare system, and, of course, in our criminal justice system, just to mention a few. And even as we strive as a nation to achieve our high ideals of liberty and freedom for all, we must openly acknowledge a history of discrimination and racism and reckon with its present-day manifestations and implications, including disturbing efforts around the country to turn back the clock on voting rights.

It is only the challenges brought about by adversity that occasion the rise of resiliency and the triumphs of the human spirit and of community action that can lift all of us.

The late Member of Congress, Shirley Chisholm, once said:

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Following a year of difficult challenges, it is fitting that as part of our Black History Month celebration, we honor innovative, courageous, and enterprising Pennsylvania leaders who have both the vision and the courage to help our communities and our Commonwealth to exhibit resilience in the face of that adversity.

TRIBUTE TO TY HOLMES

Mr. President, let me start with Ty Holmes, our first honoree. I am proud to honor Ty as a fellow resident of Scranton, and the President of the Lackawanna branch of the NAACP. Ty Holmes is well known in Scranton as an avid volunteer and advocate for diversity and inclusion through his work with multiple community organizations, including as a Penn State advisory board member, the vice president of the Scranton Rotary, and as a Lackawanna County Democratic Committee member.

Following the death of George Floyd in 2020, community members were inspired to make change in Northeastern Pennsylvania and establish the Lackawanna County NAACP. Since its founding in 2020, this NAACP branch has grown to 131 members. Under Ty Holmes' leadership, the branch is working to be a voice for underrepresented groups and serve as a bridge between them and the broader community in Scranton.

Ty also has a particular interest in bettering the lives of young people in Scranton, leading him to run for the Scranton School Board. This past November, he was elected to the board and sworn in last month. With his election, Ty Holmes becomes the first African American to ever be elected to public office in the city of Scranton. He also serves as a board member for the Northeastern Pennsylvania Youth Shelter, which provides quality emergency shelter and related services to

unaccompanied youth, ages 14 through their high school graduation.

The Northeastern Pennsylvania Youth Shelter has a specific focus on social justice and advocacy and is welcoming to young people from all backgrounds, especially LGBTQ+ youth in the area.

Ty Holmes' life has been one of service, both to his community and to his country. He retired after 25 years of Active Duty in the U.S. military, where he received numerous decorations from both the U.S. Navy and the U.S. Army. He began his military career in 1991 with the Navy and served in various duty stations throughout the South Pacific and the Middle East.

In 2003, he crossed branches and entered the U.S. Army, deploying in the Middle East. He also worked as part of the support and rescue operations in New Orleans during Hurricane Katrina in 2005.

Through his work with many community organizations and his role on the Scranton School District Board of Directors, Ty continues to build the Scranton institutions that provide support to people and those institutions that lift them up during times of adversity.

So I look forward to seeing Ty Holmes' continuing contributions to my hometown for years to come.

TRIBUTE TO DELLA CLARK

Mr. President, our second honoree is Della Clark from Philadelphia, PA. Della Clark is a true community shepherd. I am not the first to recognize Della's exemplary work, and I certainly won't be the last, but I am honored to add my voice to her chorus of admirers. Her work in the city of Philadelphia, particularly in West Philadelphia, has undoubtedly been a saving grace 100 times over.

Della is indefatigable, a true force of nature who has shown true dedication and steadfast leadership.

Since January 1, 1992, Della Clark has served as president of the Enterprise Center. This center supports minority entrepreneurs and underresourced communities and is one of the most trusted organizations in the region to advise and deliver transformative economic development and community wealth-building initiatives.

Under Della's leadership, the Enterprise Center has experienced tremendous growth. Among its accomplishments is its purchase of a dilapidated building at 46th and Market Street in West Philadelphia, which was completely renovated and now serves as the center's state-of-the-art center for business and entrepreneurship.

Additionally, affiliate organizations have been added to the center's portfolio, including the Enterprise Center Community Development Corporation and the Enterprise Center Capital Corporation. Today, the Enterprise Center is leading a project that will be transformative for the city of Philadelphia—the 52nd Street Initiative.

This commercial corridor along 52nd Street in West Philadelphia has been

an important historical and cultural hub, but unfortunately has seen significant decline and recent disinvestment just over the last number of years.

Further exacerbating the already existing troubles for business owners and residents, the COVID-19 pandemic and civil unrest have made recovery and revitalization challenging at best. The Enterprise Center has a bold vision for this 52nd Street Initiative, which will transform this street—52nd Street—into a national model for integrating technology to improve public safety, enhance visitor experience, and support businesses and residents.

With Della Clark at the helm, I am confident she will move mountains to see to it that this project reaches its full potential and that this vital neighborhood and its residents can thrive once again.

Della Clark speaks eloquently—yet fiercely—on the importance of investing in Black and Brown businesses and is a tireless advocate for equitable distribution of and access to resources and capital. For that, I thank her for being a champion, a leader, and a true servant for her community.

TRIBUTE TO JULIUS BOATWRIGHT

Mr. President, in Southwestern Pennsylvania, our third honoree is Julius Boatwright. Not only has the pandemic taken a toll on the Nation's physical health, but many Americans struggle with mental health challenges, particularly isolation and grief. Julius Boatwright knows that good mental health is fundamental, foundational, to overall well-being.

He has made delivering critical mental health services his life's work. At a time when the pandemic has left many Americans feeling isolated, alone, and depressed, Julius's mission has renewed urgency.

In his work as a licensed social worker, community-based therapist, and outpatient therapist, Julius Boatwright has led with profound vulnerability and understanding. His passion for mental health is derived from a deeply personal place. Julius has bravely discussed his own mental health struggles in an effort to open up a conversation about mental well-being. His experience of growing up in a household and a community where mental health was never talked about planted the desire for him to address silent suffering.

In college, the death of a friend by suicide could have disrupted Julius's journey to becoming a mental health professional. Instead, this deeply personal challenge spurred him onward. He would go on to earn a bachelor's degree in communications and a master's of social work, with a certificate in human services management, from the University of Pittsburgh, as well as establish the Pittsburgh-based nonprofit Steel Smiling.

Julius is now the founding and managing director of Steel Smiling. The organization's mission is to bridge the gap between Black people and mental